

My Editor Ghosted Me

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AND I'M AT A LOSS FOR WORDS

By Fredricka Maister

In June, my editor, Jessica, wrote, "Just wanted to let you know that I'm running a couple days behind on getting the (minimal) notes on Part III to you. Sorry for the delay."



She was referring to the 40 pages I had sent her in April.

After working with Jessica for almost two years on my book of essays, I had grown accustomed to her delays. Early in our relationship, Jessica had a new baby, her father had recently died and she, an only child, had been left caring for her mother. I accepted her excuses as gospel: "I've been swamped with deadlines," "My toddler and I had a nasty cold," "I went out-of-town for a wedding," and "My internet was down because of the hurricane."

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I point-blank asked her during one long delay that if editing my book was a burden, would she want to recommend another editor? She promised missed deadlines would no longer be a problem.

While her delays upset my writing schedule, her editorial comments were spot-on and the developmental help she gave me in structuring my patchwork of essays was invaluable. Jessica understood that writing about the death of my father when I was 12, the murder of my partner, Richard, and the unexpected death of my mother challenged me emotionally and creatively. She said she was still mourning the loss of her father and related to my subject matter, calling my manuscript "a heartbreakingly page turner."

Since I was still working on Part II, a large chunk of writing with pages of Jessica's notes to consider, I didn't mind cutting her some slack with Part III. However, after receiving no comments weeks after her email and having finally finished my Part II revision, I panicked. Had something unspeakable happened to her or her family?

Always the catastrophizer, I checked her city's newspaper obituaries; I was relieved she was not among them.

I followed up with an email asking, "Any idea when you will be sending the editorial notes?"

More weeks passed. Antsy and gung-ho to finish my manuscript, I texted, "May I please have the courtesy of a response from you?"

Still no reply. I continually tried to reach her via email, text and phone—to no avail.

I found her LinkedIn account and called a newspaper for which she had been doing some editing. I explained my situation to the editor and asked, "Is she okay?"

"I spoke with her a few days ago," he said. He took my name and number to pass along to her.

Jessica was ghosting me. I had no options left, short of hopping on a plane and showing up on her distant doorstep.

Now I just feel embarrassment and shame for not trusting my initial instincts and heeding the red flags as we continued to work together.

Why hadn't I paid attention when several months before Jessica ghosted me, she had ghosted—for reasons unknown—the friend who had touted her expertise and recommended her to me? Jessica terminated their relationship just as she was helping her send her manuscript to agents. When my friend sent flowers on her birthday, Jessica never acknowledged the gesture.

I don't know why Jessica abandoned me and my friend like hotcakes. Workload overwhelm? Or could it be that since my friend's manuscript had already been edited, and she only had "minimal" notes to offer me, we were no longer financially viable clients? I had planned to consult with her on crafting my book proposal, a source of anxiety since starting work on Part I.

For weeks, I felt so frustrated and angry I stopped working on my book.

At least I hadn't given Jessica money upfront. I paid for her services after each section was completed. Recently, I've heard about writers paying thousands of dollars in advance to an editor who did not deliver as promised. The editor threatened litigation if they complained or publicly badmouthed her. In comparison, I got off easy.

Although I miss the luxury of working with an editor, I am not interested in starting from scratch with someone new. Besides, to my happy surprise, I have found my inner mojo to move forward on my own with Part III revisions. And I'll soon be ready to tackle that daunting book proposal!

So, how did I overcome my writing slump? Gradually, without drama, and with lots of positive self-talk.

I'm a writer, not a quitter, and I can, and I will finish my book by myself
became my mantras.

I also came to realize through my 12-step Al-Anon work that I was powerless to change Jessica's unprofessional, inexplicable behavior, and that I had a choice: accept my experience with her and forge ahead or stay stuck in non-writing mode.

I still have not heard from Jessica and probably never will. I've adjusted to that reality. She may have vanished like a ghost from my life, but I believe Karma has her address.

Fredricka R. Maister is a Philadelphia-based memoirist/essayist. Her work has appeared in a variety of print and online publications, such as *The Baltimore Sun*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Jewish Week/The Times of Israel*, *Forward*, *OZY*, *The Manifest-Station*, *Broad Street Review*, *ducts.org*, *Inner Circle Writers' Magazine (UK)*, and *The Writer*.
